

## Pervasive problems of governing: an analytic framework

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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version  
Sammelwerksbeitrag / collection article

### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Rose, R. (1979). Pervasive problems of governing: an analytic framework. In J. Matthes (Ed.), *Sozialer Wandel in Westeuropa: Verhandlungen des 19. Deutschen Soziologentages in Berlin 1979* (pp. 29-54). Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verl. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-136848>

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Richard Rose

Pervasive Problems of Governing: An Analytic Framework .

By definition, governing is a matter of confronting and coping with a very wide range of problems. Analytically, the idea of ungovernability is a nonsense. The question is not whether we shall be governed but how. A modern Western society can no more do without the authority of government than it could do without money as a medium of exchange. Ungovernability can be only a temporary phase of anarchy in the career of a political system, followed by the establishment of a new regime or the re-establishment of the regime under challenge.

Just as optimism was the mood of the 1960s, so pessimism about government has become widespread in the 1970s. In a calm, deliberate analysis of the putative waning of the welfare state, Fritz Scharpf foresees "social change of an order of magnitude which is comparable to the transition from laissez faire capitalism to the welfare state half a century ago".<sup>1</sup> Samuel P. Huntington argues that in this new era, "postindustrial politics could be the darker side of post industrial society", and chastises social scientists for averting their gaze from this prospect simply because it is "unpleasant".<sup>2</sup> Citizens as well as scholars express nervousness about the future. A survey in nine nations of the European Community in autumn 1977 found people were almost twice as likely to fear social tensions leading to civil disorder in the next decade as to fear the outbreak of a third world war. The median Briton reckoned there was an almost 50-50 chance of civil disorder in the years ahead, and the median German the same.<sup>3</sup>

Notwithstanding prognoses of imminent doom, no Western regime has collapsed in the 1970s or been replaced by a coup, as was the Fourth French Republic in 1958.<sup>4</sup> But the survival of a regime is not proof that its contemporary authority is the same as twenty or fifty years ago. Regimes can change significantly in character--for better or worse--without a complete constitutional breakdown. To believe that governing in the 1980s will be easy and congenial is to presuppose that there is a 'hidden hand' mechanism automatically maintaining political authority in a desirable equilibrium.

The object of this article is to identify in clear analytic terms pervasive problems that could threaten the political authority of Western governments today. The first section defines the concept of political authority and distinguishes those problems that are central to authority. The next two sections consider whether in contemporary circumstances perennial problems of allocating resources and government organisation raise new challenges to political authority. Questions of political consent are considered in sections that deal with value conflict, and with civic indifference. The concluding section speculates about the chief meta-problem of political authority today: whether challenges to the effectiveness of government undermine political consent as well?

#### IV POLITICAL AUTHORITY IN THE POLICY PROCESS

Logically, the first stage in analysis is the definition of terms. Political authority concerns persisting and pervasive relationships between governors and governed.<sup>4</sup> It has two elements, effectiveness and consent. An organisation that cannot effectively influence the society around it is not a government. A government that acts without the consent of the governed is not government as we like to think of it in the Western world today. Those who write about ungovernability address both these concerns; some emphasise a putative decline of effectiveness, others are worried about the possible loss of consent, and a third group sees political authority threatened on both counts.

Effectiveness is the first concern of governors. Government is not only about good intentions; it is also about getting things done. To be effective in society, a government must be able to raise and allocate resources to meet its commitments of public policy. In addition, a government must be able to organise the complex maze of institutions that constitute the modern state. A government is more or less effective, depending upon the resources and organisation it commands. Whereas technocracy was once thought capable of indefinite extension in the service of the post-industrial state, today there is a crisis

of confidence in technique. In Scharpf's diagnosis, government's effectiveness has declined because of the "cumulation and inter-relatedness of problems and the interdependence of solutions... Avoiding the crisis of ungovernability means, above all, avoiding the disappointment, frustration and disaffection resulting from visible policy failures".<sup>5</sup>

Consent is the most important political concern of citizens in contemporary Western nations. In contemporary Western societies, individuals cannot be conditioned automatically to do whatever government commands. A given distribution of values in society affects consent, for the existence among social groups of politically salient non-bargainable value conflicts will deprive government of full normative support. The consent of citizens is also registered in behaviour: citizens may comply with basic political laws: as in Northern Ireland, consciously defy them, or register indifference toward the lawful manifestation of political authority. Civic indifference can be as debilitating to governmental effectiveness (and far less risky on the part of individuals) than resort to organised or unorganised protest.

Consent and effectiveness are inter-related, for the success of any public policy requires the co-operation of affected citizens. If this co-operation is given voluntarily or if citizens respond positively to appropriate programme incentives, then policies are more likely to be effective and efficient. The participation of citizens is contingent, not certain. It is far easier to encourage participation in programmes dispensing cash benefits, such as pensions, than in programmes that impose costs upon those involved, such as a wage freeze.

The ideal government is a fully legitimate authority, enjoying both the consent of citizens and effectiveness in action. Fear of losing political legitimacy is the most important underlying theme of writings about 'ungovernability'. A repudiated régime, without effectiveness or consent, can be consigned to the ranks of historical has beens. A regime under challenge may

adapt policies and institutions to maintain both consent and effectiveness, or it may give first priority to one at the cost of the other. A regime that sacrifices effectiveness for consent may survive, but it can hardly carry out the programmes of a contemporary mixed economy welfare state. A regime that loses popular consent but still retains effectiveness could use the threat of coercion to carry out its policies; this is the customary form of government in Eastern Europe today, as well as in Western Europe in days past.

Because political legitimacy is usually taken for granted, at least in the Anglo-American world, there is no institution concentrating upon the defence of political authority. In Continental countries, where authority has not been taken for granted, there is an old tradition of placing internal security first, and consciously policing to maintain order. Today chief executives appear to worry more about international than internal threats to the authority of their regime.

Problems of effectiveness are immediate, whereas those of consent are typically latent. Every senior politician or bureaucrat has an in-tray full of problems arising from resource constraints or organisational limits upon the effectiveness of government. In fortunate times and places when consent can be taken for granted, it poses no problem for attention. But a question of consent may surface if, for example, a protest group challenges a law, or if government itself contemplates legislation that may be against the interests of strategically placed groups, e.g. legislation regulating strikes.

The effectiveness of government is immediately at issue in two stages of the policy process. At a given point in time, a government must relate its policy commitments (both those of its own volition, and the cumulative sum of its predecessors' choices) to national resources (e.g. gross national product, population, mineral and energy supplies, etc.). Resources should not be judged by some absolute standard, but in relation to policy commitments. In addition, a government must direct,

control and guide its institutions to convert resources into programmes producing outputs intended to realise manifold policy commitments. Giving overall direction is not easy, for government is not a single institution, but a congeries of organisations with more or less functionally specific programme responsibilities and resources.

This paper is not concerned with effectiveness for its own sake, as is the literature of public administration. Effectiveness is of particular concern here insofar as it threatens to spill over to undermine consent as well. The consent of citizens affects the policy process in two ways. If groups of citizens make demands based upon conflicting non-bargainable values, the resulting conflict threatens the rejection of government's claim to be the final authority to resolve social differences. Northern Ireland is an extreme example of a society without an effective political authority, because of a non-bargainable value conflict within its population. But citizen demands and responses do not need to feed back into the political system in a conflictual or consensual manner; they may also feed out, that is, citizens may become indifferent to government, looking to other institutions of society to secure their wants.

Time is the fundamental axis of the policy process, for programmes of government, whatever their origins, tend to persist. Without invoking all that is implied in the term catastrophe theory, current concern with political authority emphasises that the future cannot be assumed simply to reflect the persistence of the past. The persistence of past behaviour may lead to a reversal of fortunes; for example, continuous growth in energy consumption can intensify future problems of energy supplies.

Within the policy process, there are four points at which it is specially relevant to look for trends that could alter political authority. The first concerns the relationship between commitments and resources; if the latter are not adequate to meet the claims of the former, then effectiveness will diminish efficiency and effectiveness. Thirdly, if the outputs of govern-

ments are in conflict with values of a significant fraction of a society, consent will diminish. If the outputs of government stimulate indifference rather than compliance, consent will also diminish.

## II THE BALANCE OF RESOURCES: Fiscal Dividend or Overload?

In the era of undoubted affluence, national resources were meant to be the solution rather than the cause of political difficulties. An ever growing national product, itself reflecting an ever more sophisticated level of societal organisation, was meant to provide both quick technological fixes for immediate difficulties, and ever increasing abundance for all.

Statute books enshrine past spending commitments. The inertia commitments of government are the chief determinant of a government's need for money. The decisions that a government makes during its term of office have far less effect upon total public expenditure than the cumulative and virtually uncontrollable decisions of its predecessors. Many laws cannot be repealed without violating an implicit contract with citizens, e.g. old age pensions. Others, such as education, cannot be repealed without creating hostility among those providing a public service as well as its recipients. The permanence of government organisations not only entrenches the commitments of government, but also is a force promoting increasing expenditure.<sup>6</sup>

In the contemporary mixed economy welfare state, the causes of increasing costs of public policy are of three main types.<sup>7</sup> Consumers of welfare benefits can push up public spending by a growth in the numbers receiving a given programme, or by demanding more and better public services. Producers of public goods and services, ranging from social workers to the military, are strategically placed spending lobbies within government. A growth in the supply of tax revenue, whether caused by real economic growth or inflation, can also lead to greater public spending.

In the 1950s and 1960s economic growth everywhere

produced a fiscal dividend, supplying greater tax revenues to government without any increase in tax rates. Governments expanded welfare programmes providing major benefits to most citizens in childhood, ill health and retirement. Simultaneously, individual take-home pay rose. Daniel Bell has argued that economic growth has been "a political solvent", providing the means of "financing social welfare expenditures and defence without reallocating income (always a politically difficult matter) or burdening the poor (which has become an equally difficult affair)".<sup>8</sup>

Past success threatens future effectiveness, for the costs of public policy have been growing at a faster rate than the economy as a whole. From 1951 through 1977, the costs of public policy have been growing at an average of 7.1 per cent in six major Western nations--Britain, France, Germany, Italy Sweden and the United States. Concurrently, the national economies have grown at an average annual rate of 4.2 per cent. In decades past, the costs of public policy could grow faster, because the total cost was a limited fraction of the national product. For example, when government claimed only one-quarter of the national product, the average annual growth of 7.1 per cent in total government spending anticipated a 1.8 per cent growth in the economy as a whole. But when the costs of governing are equivalent to 50 per cent of the national product, this anticipates an annual growth in the economy of more than 3.5 per cent. In the 1970s, Western economies have grown more slowly than before, (an annual average of 2.4 per cent) while the costs of public policy have continued to rise as before. Every major Western government now faces the risk that the growing costs of public policy may consume all the fiscal dividend of economic growth, and then some.

Overloading the political economy immediately threatens a loss of effectiveness and efficiency. A loss of effectiveness follows if a government makes commitments in excess of resources; it must meet this real deficit by causing a few programmes to abort or fail through gross underfunding, or alternatively by



'undernourishing many programmes, cutting spending on capital maintenance and staffing. Government is losing efficiency, as it finds it increasingly costly to reduce unemployment by one percentage point, or to reduce inflation by a similar amount. Government loses effectiveness too, when orthodox Keynesian economic measures fail to reduce either inflation or unemployment. Given that the shortfall between commitments and resources is only a small proportion of its total national product, the loss is likely to be marginal, that is, 'only' a few billions of pounds, or tens of billions of dollars or Deutsche Marks.

The introduction of wage and price controls in response to the problems of an overloaded economy could stimulate value dissent in place of consent in countries such as Britain, where government is not normally regarded as a legitimate arbiter of wages and prices. To prevent the loss of consent, governments often build in provisions for ineffectiveness, with such safety valves as wages drift through shop-floor productivity bargaining, price increases in response to rising import costs, and an emphasis upon the temporary nature of controls.<sup>9</sup> These safety valves reduce government's effectiveness, but help preserve consent to authority, for the market pathologies of controls are not sustained long enough to stimulate a severe economic reaction, and interest groups are not asked to comply indefinitely with policies in fundamental conflict with their immediate market interests.

Citizen indifference is the other possible consequence of government overloading the political economy. If the costs of public policy grow more than the national product, government's lawful claim to tax the first fruits of economic growth will cause a cut in real take-home pay, that is, post-tax pre-transfer income. The past quarter-century has shown that citizens are ready to accept a smaller share of the national product as take-home pay, when it is increasing in absolute real terms. Just as workers resist more strongly an employer who tries to cut real wages than an employer who refuses a real increase, so citizens can be expected to react more strongly against a government that

cuts instead of protects their take-home pay. From 1970 through 1977, the world recession and increasing public spending have caused take-home pay to fall in at least one year in every major Western nation, in three years in Britain and Italy, and in four years out of seven in Sweden. Projections from the past 25 years indicate that there is a real risk of take-home pay undergoing a secular decline in Italy, Britain and Sweden, unless governments alter past trends in economic growth and/or in the growth of public spending. The risk is less immediate in America, Germany and France, though much depends in the German case upon assuming another period of rapid economic growth to offset the relative economic stagnation of the 1970s, and the continued steady growth in the costs of public policy.<sup>10</sup>

Civic indifference is a cheap, easy and readily available substitute for the rebellion implicit in value conflict. In-different citizens do not need to make an active show of defiance of authority. Instead, they need only ignore it, withdrawing from the field in which government is dominant. Citizens can register their indifference by tax avoidance and tax evasion, immediate and direct remedies for the problem of falling take-home pay, albeit remedies that externalise costs onto government.

### III THE ORGANISATION OF GOVERNMENT: Productive or Counter-Productive?

By definition, the government of a modern state is a complex organisation capable of undertaking a wide variety of different and difficult activities. A high level of institutionalisation is essential for maintaining order in any society, especially contemporary societies. In any long-term historical perspective, the productive capacity of contemporary government--that is, its ability to get things done that were unthinkable a century or more ago--is undeniable. But there is no necessary reason to believe that the effectiveness of government increases in a linear manner. Whereas the organisational capacity of government was once seen as a means to the end of resolving society's problems, today its institutions are often attacked as part of the problem.<sup>11</sup>

Since organisation affects political authority in a limited number of respects, many of the complaints currently being voiced about 'big' government are not relevant here. The debate about market versus governmental allocation of society's resources concerns the efficiency not the legitimacy of government. Political controversies about the growth of government organisations are normally concerned with familiar and persisting conflicts of interest, and not questions of political authority per se. Complaints about the costs of government are not relevant to political authority, for the crucial question about resources is relative; what is the ratio between growing costs and growth in the national product?

Many of the problems of contemporary government organisation concern efficiency, not effectiveness. The former can undermine the latter only in extreme cases, when efficiency has declined so much that an increasing commitment of resources lowers productivity in absolute and not just relative terms. The growth in government, cannot be condemned as inefficient by invoking a priori assumptions about the economies or diseconomies of scale. Systematic surveys of evidence show that neither assumption is necessarily true.<sup>12</sup>

The growth of public expenditure has not made government less efficient, for a disproportionate share of this growth is accounted for by an expansion of cash transfer payments, especially old age pensions. The ease with which eligibility criteria are established for pensions means that all government need do is write cheques, and government is a relatively efficient cheque-writing machine. Spending more money on education or health is not ipso facto likely to lead to increased inefficiency, for both services are highly decentralized, and the bulk of money goes to those directly providing services to clients: teachers, doctors and hospital staff.

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The growth in the number of public sector employees in every Western nation does not necessarily make government less efficient. The growth in personnel has tended to occur among the more educated and presumptively skilled (e.g., teachers, health service employees, social workers, etc.) or by the transfer of industrial production workers from private to public payrolls. In many countries there has been a decline in the proportion of the labour force in the military, a service difficult to evaluate for effectiveness in the absence of war, and often criticised for lack of efficiency.

The growth of government can be expected to reduce efficiency, at least marginally, because of the need to co-ordinate a larger and more heterogeneous number of organisations undertaking programme objectives. The twentieth century growth of government has not been just a simple expansion in the scale of existing hierarchical integrated organisations. It has also involved an explosion in the structure of government, at central, regional and local levels and outside normal departmental structures as well. President Carter's re-organisation team required 45 pages to produce a one-line-per-agency description of the executive branch. Having done this, the compilers caution:

It is important to emphasise that this categorisation of organisational elements does not constitute an exhaustive accounting of the whole federal government. Rather, its purpose is to establish a definition of the executive branch for the re-organisation process. We anticipate changes as the re-organisation study groups learn more about the executive branch.<sup>13</sup>

As the size of a given bureau or department increases, there is a disproportionate increase in the number of layers through which communications must pass and the number of clearances required to undertake any action of consequence. Moreover, as a given bureau or department combines more specialists and specialist tasks, there is an increase in the number

of clearances among interdependent groups concerned with a given programme. One study of the flow of work within the federal executive branch in Washington found that in more than two-thirds of the cases examined, one bureau's action was simply an input to another agency within the government.<sup>14</sup>

The 'ageing' of government programmes and organisations can further inhibit effectiveness, for they survive by a kind of mortmain.<sup>15</sup> The creation of new government programmes and bureaux without the termination of older commitments and units makes contemporary government an amalgam of activities created in response to past conditions that may no longer obtain; of activities with continuing contemporary relevance; and of new activities meant to be implemented in an environment that is already densely populated by previously established programmes. The prior claims to jurisdiction of established organisations must be accepted as part of the price of introducing a new programme. 'Ageing' can lead to 'overinstitutionalisation', in which pluralistic stagnation results.

The growth in the number of government programmes threatens to reduce government's effectiveness, insofar as it increases the probability that the actions of one bureau will contradict those of another. Contradictions among social preferences are not new. What is new is that government is increasingly expected to internalise these contradictions. In the words of a French student of public administration, "l'administration est ainsi conduite à interioriser l'ensemble des conflits sociaux de la société. Reproduisant ces conflits en son sein, elle les transforme en conflits bureaucratiques".<sup>16</sup>

The effectiveness of government will decline, insofar as new programmes tend to seek objectives beyond the means of government (or any formal organisation) to achieve unilaterally by its own actions. At one time governments concentrated primarily upon activities for which there were known organisational technologies, such as building roads, training soldiers or teaching the essentials of reading, writing and

arithmetic. The growth of government's activities in the post-war era has involved it in trying to influence complex processes of interaction that it cannot control. Governments have increasingly adopted programmes intended to reduce or remove social pathology, e.g., crime, poverty or mental illness, but social scientists cannot provide clear cause-and-effect models of social change, or, insofar as causes can be identified (e.g., the family) they are not readily amenable to control by acts of public policy.

The growth of government has involved more people as clients, recognised interest groups, or as grass-roots participants. Institutionalised participation is intended to increase the responsiveness of government to diverse interests within society. At a minimum, this increases the time it takes government to act. Insofar as participants become veto groups, not only objecting to proposals of government but also to proposals put forward by other participants in consultations, increased participation can also limit the effectiveness of government.

While the loss of governmental efficiency is costly, these costs may be acceptable as part of the 'overhead' of government. In an imperfect world, no government can operate without some inefficiency. For example, the American Office of Management and Budget estimates that paperwork for federal reporting requires up to 785 million hours annually, the equivalent in effort of approximately 470,000 fulltime employees.<sup>17</sup> In societal terms, the labour requirement is less than one half of one per cent of America's total labour force. It is up to politicians in Congress, not efficiency experts, to determine whether this cost is too much or worthwhile in relation to whatever benefits are produced by regulation.

Organisational inefficiency and ineffectiveness might indirectly threaten political authority, if the aggregate costs of organisational inadequacies forced governmental spending upward at a rate that is greater than the growth of the national

product itself. In a country such as Italy, where government organisation makes control of public expenditure very difficult, this could conceivably happen. But Italy is an extreme or deviant example of the state. Moreover, the overcommitment of resources is so widespread, threatening Sweden and Britain as well as Italy, that it cannot be explained away as a consequence of inefficiency.

Organisational ineffectiveness can induce civic indifference. If citizens find that government organisations do not produce what is intended, this is likely to encourage people to stop relying upon government to provide for their needs, turning instead to the private sector (e.g., the shift from public transport to private motoring) or from one public sector agency (e.g., labour intensive post office) to another (e.g., the highly mechanised telephone service). Once politicians conclude that they are relatively powerless to give effective direction to government, they too may become indifferent to its policies, substituting concern with their own personal status for organisational power.<sup>18</sup>

Value conflict does not arise from organisational growth per se, but only from government adopting programmatic goals that an organisation cannot resolve by consent. In certain circumstances, increasing organisational complexity may reduce rather than stimulate value conflict. A government may adopt an ineffective policy to avoid the value conflict likely to arise if it acted effectively against those who refused consent to a given policy. For example, the liberum veto institutions of the European Community, are not designed to secure efficiency, or to maximise effectiveness. Instead, they are designed to maximise consent, for the Community is organised to promote "mutual accommodation and problem-solving in a political rather than a technocratic manner".<sup>19</sup>

#### IV VALUES: Harmony or Conflict?

While the effectiveness of government is a perennial concern, political consent is so taken for granted that it is

only of concern to elites or masses when challenged. In contemporary Western political systems, political institutions are intended to see that what government does will receive the voluntary consent of citizens. Citizens give consent to government without giving 100 per cent endorsement to every action that it takes. A government can maintain full consent as long as popular support for the regime is stronger than differences of opinion about particular issues of the day. Specific policies of a government only occasionally give positive expression to consensual values of society. More often, policies are simply 'not inconsistent' with fundamental political values. As long as policies do not violate cultural norms or directly affect values divisive within society, there is no need for a large and complex government to suffer any challenges to its political authority.

Value conflicts arise only as and when government seeks to act against a group that is so strongly committed to a given goal that its members are not prepared to settle differences by political bargaining within the rules of the regime. Non-bargainable issues have three distinct properties.<sup>20</sup> The first is that they are zero-sum so that the realisation of one group's goal, for example, racial segregation, would mean defeat for others favouring racial integration. Secondly, when value conflicts concern collective goods, all must share in the decisions made; in such circumstances, "he who says collective goods says public evils".<sup>21</sup> A third characteristic of non-bargainable conflict is that protagonists state their views as absolute ends: they are not means to other ends, such as winning votes or gaining office, nor can they be traded off for other benefits. Absolute values are advanced without regard for their consequences to authority structures: fiat justitia, ruant coeli.

The causes of historic value conflicts can be found in non-bargainable differences about religion, language and national identity, and race. Faith in religion as an absolute and dominant value of society has declined within Churches as



as well as within society at large, as is demonstrated by clergymen who denounce sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland as 'unchristian', forgetting the very ground of their being. The movement of armies across the landmass of Europe in the two great wars of this century and the collapse of polyglot Empires has done much to homogenise languages within nations, if not between them. Quebec and Brussels are today the chief points at which disagreement about language could readily give rise to non-bargainable value conflicts. While a variety of groups in Western countries today claim distinctive national identities, most do not challenge authority and those that do can be ignored politically on the principle of de minimis.<sup>22</sup>

While economic differences are perennial, they are not ipso facto a basis for value conflict. Economic differences are typically expressed in money terms. It is easy to bargain about the division of money rewards, because money, unlike language or national identity, is infinitely divisible. Moreover, when there is a fiscal dividend from economic growth, differences can be resolved by outcomes in which all participants gain, both in take-home pay and in public policies. Economic differences threaten political authority as and when they may be translated into disputes about the power of the regime, for example, about whether all citizens ought to accept government regulation of wages or redistribution of income. In times of pressure upon resources, imprudent government policies could create a value conflict; for that reason, governments are unlikely to adopt such policies wittingly.

European election returns indicate little support for political parties representing values that cannot be reconciled with the status quo. The Italian Communist Party and the French Communists have proclaimed their acceptance of the regime in which they live, leaving only very small revolutionary parties of the left to proclaim old goals of combat. Nationalists have been overall weak. By definition, a territorially based secessionist party has a limited appeal nationwide; it may even, like Plaid Cymru in Wales, divide members of its nation,

constituting a minority within it.

Public opinion surveys show little popular support for a revolutionary assault upon authority in furtherance of absolute values. Surveys carried out in the member-nations of the European Community consistently find small proportions--in autumn, 1977 only six per cent--endorsing unconstitutional (that is, revolutionary) change.<sup>23</sup> The majority (55 per cent in 1977) consistently favour changing society by gradualist means. While there are armed terrorist groups rejecting the regimes of various Continental countries, they do not divide their societies, but rather, as in Italy, unite virtually all citizens in defence of public order.

The emergence of a basic value conflict reduces citizen indifference, mobilising a population by polarising it into groups in opposition to each other. This is most immediately the case when value conflicts arise about quasi-ascriptive social characteristics, for everyone is assigned to a linguistic, racial or religious group, and implicated in the political conflict. Political consciousness is heightened if apolitical individuals suddenly find that they are treated as members of a given group, and are driven to support a cause with which they share a common primordial identification. Only by a conscious act of counter-identification, itself requiring a high level of involvement, can an individual maintain civic indifference in a society so divided politically.

If value conflicts become intense, a government can try to avoid jeopardising consent by abandoning a given policy, thus diminishing the scope of its effectiveness. Alternatively, it may try to maintain effectiveness by adopting coercion to secure compliance. Governments of Eastern Europe demonstrate that it is possible to govern by coercing those with dissident values--but coercive authority is hardly acceptable to governors or governed in the Western world today.

## V CIVIC BEHAVIOUR: Compliance, Conflict or Indifference?

A conflict-oriented approach to political authority allows only two alternatives: citizens comply with basic laws, whether voluntarily or by coercion, or else they openly defy authority. There is, however, an important third alternative: citizens can be indifferent to what government commands. Citizen indifference is a sign of a lack of loyalty that is not manifested in voice.

When value conflicts arise, indifferent citizens withdraw from the fray, turning their backs upon authority and shrugging their shoulders in surprise that some people take politics so seriously. They disinvest in their role as citizens, turning instead to other roles--parent, spouse, friend or economic man.

Indifference cripples political authority without causing it to collapse. Apathetic citizens may positively support authority and their low level of political involvement can even make government work more efficiently.<sup>24</sup> But this is true only as long as government requires passive co-operation. Many programmes of government today require the active collaboration of citizens. Indifferent citizens may be ready to collaborate in the consumption of welfare benefits, but not in paying for them through taxes. When apathy has a negative effect upon compliance with laws, the exercise of political authority becomes qualitatively more difficult.

Italy is the Western nation where civic indifference is most important as a constraint upon political authority. The Republic has survived for more than three decades against both leftwing and rightwing challenges, but in an important sense, it is a case of "survival without governing".<sup>25</sup> The exercise of authority is in part inhibited by a mixture of civic distrust and doubt that government can or will make conditions better. For example, in a 1977 DOXA survey, the median respondent thought every possible combination of parties

in government would be somewhat harmful, except for a 'black' centre-right coalition, which was judged to lead to "unbearable damage".<sup>26</sup> At the elite level, indifference has been symbolised since 1976 by the retention in office of a Christian Democratic government sustained by Communist Party policy of non sfiducia (literally, 'not no confidence').

One long-term and indirect cause of citizen indifference is almost certainly the decline in compliance with the authority of social institutions generally, including the family, the church, and education, by comparison with the static, hierarchical and agrarian standestaat. The disjunction of social and political authority is illustrated by the abandonment of legislation attempting to control public morality, once regarded as a prime responsibility of government. The permissive society demonstrates how indifferent citizens can be to moral decrees laid down by established authorities.

The decline in the ethos of organic solidarity may also have reduced positive commitment to political authority, for individuals are no longer encouraged to identify their individual wellbeing with the nation's wellbeing. The growth of the welfare state reflects a calculating individual desire for collective insurance to meet individual needs as much as it expresses a sense of collective community care. The translation of organic ties into the cash nexus is most evident in the growth of public sector unions, with strike action threatened or taken by teachers, nurses or doctors, people whose professional values as well as beante status would formerly have prevented such action.

Where government accepts responsibility for the management of the national economy, inflation is also an indicator of civic indifference. Inflation reflects a determination by organised workers and business firms to raise money earnings by their own actions, indifferent to government exhortations to restrain wage and price increases. Economic groups will not voluntarily comply with the exhortations of political managers of the economy when they have no confidence that their

exhortations will be effective. Scheuch notes that citizen indifference is found in Eastern Europe too: "The danger to the Communist system is less that workers start throwing stones at tanks but that they go to sleep at their machines".<sup>27</sup>

The increasing volatility of voters in the past decade is another sign of growing civic indifference to established political institutions. Voters have shown a readiness to abandon what were once thought to be stable and strong party identifications without shifting support to anti-regime parties. Among major Western nations, in the past decade only Germany and Sweden have had electoral swings confined within the normal parameters of a stable party system. In France and Italy, moreover, any shift from government to opposition could be a weakening of support for the regime, because neither regime has yet demonstrated that it can survive unscathed a transfer of power to the left.

Ironically, growing civic indifference may reduce the risk of value conflicts, for citizens who have become indifferent to the wishes of one group of political leaders will be less disposed to put their trust in another. Insofar as indifference makes government less effective, citizens will have less immediate stimulus to repudiate a regime. Indifference is a cheap and easy alternative to rebellion. An indifferent citizen does not need to take up arms against a regime; he simply closes his eyes and ears to what it commands. The apathetic masses may sit out power struggles within government, and turn the victor's position into a hollow triumph by shutting out a new government behind a wall of indifference.

If citizen indifference to government increases, this will reduce government's effectiveness in managing economic resources. Western governments depend upon the voluntary consent of individuals and organisations rather than upon the coercive direction of labour and capital, as in a command economy of Eastern Europe. Indifferent citizens will not have any incentive to co-operate with a government that fails to achieve its major economic objectives.

Increasing indifference can lead citizens to reduce resources available to government by tax avoidance and tax evasion. Tax avoidance uses legal loopholes to reduce liabilities on cash income, or even to demonetize labour. For example, individuals can substitute their own untaxed do-it-yourself efforts around the house for work by skilled craftsmen who must be paid pre-tax gross wages from the post-tax income of the householder. Tax evasion is a second means by which individuals' indifference to laws reduces government's effectiveness. There is a cash incentive to do so, for a pound of untaxed income is worth half again as much as a pound of taxed income. Indifferent citizens may not only indulge in solitary fiddles, but also show readiness to co-operate with others in tax evasion. If tax evasion becomes increasingly acceptable in society, notwithstanding formal illegality, effectiveness can be eroded at an accelerating rate, as the risks of non-compliance decline with the increasing inadequacy of sanctions against tax evasion.<sup>28</sup>

## VI POLITICAL AUTHORITY AS A META-PROBLEM

Political authority is by definition a meta-concept, involving both regime effectiveness and popular consent. The important question of the day is whether contemporary difficulties of Western governments only concern effectiveness, or threaten consent as well. If only effectiveness is in jeopardy, we may see a decline in the organisational competence and resources of government, but this would not of itself put political authority at risk.

Most of the literature of ungovernability (like the complementary literature about revolution and revolutionaries) overestimates the probability of value conflicts leading to an overt and explicit challenge to the authority of Western government. Such writings also tend to underestimate the prospect of a regime surviving by coercion, supported by groups sufficiently committed to the established values of the regime to sanction all means necessary to prevent its overthrow. A noteworthy feature of the rise of protest and terrorist activities in the

past decade has been the widespread popular support for harsh anti-subversive and anti-terrorist measures, even in a society such as England, relatively untouched by political violence.<sup>29</sup>

To assert that revolution or anarchy will not happen here does not mean that nothing will happen to political authority. The possibility of citizen consent turning to civil indifference tends to be underestimated. The more that government tries to organise citizens, the more it risks demobilising them. The decline of hierarchical social authority is a reminder that manmade institutions are not immutable. Paradoxically, the growth of civic indifference may itself insulate government from overt value conflicts, as it reduces individual dependence upon and interest in what government does. Concurrently, the insulation of individual and group activities from government will reduce political effectiveness at a time when politicians wish to increase it.

In a very general sense, any problem of political authority contains the seeds of its own resolution. If effectiveness and consent drastically decline, then a regime is repudiated; retrospectively, its failure appears inevitable. If a regime survives, from a sufficiently abstract level of system analysis it can be said to persist. It may persist by trading off governmental effectiveness for consent, as in Anglophone responses to the challenge of the Parti Quebecois in Canada. It may persist by relying upon intermittently effective coercion, as in Reginald Maudling's objective of securing an 'acceptable' level of violence in Northern Ireland. A regime may also persist by positively increasing resources through a spurt of economic growth, or increasing the efficiency of its own institutions.

Whatever the character of its political authority, government goes on--but it may not go on in future as before. The literature of ungovernability, for all its analytic inadequacies and ideological biases, does address a fundamental and often overlooked question of political science. We are ready enough to analyse the rise and fall of regimes with the

hindsight of history, or to commend philosophers for insights about political authority in centuries when it was neither absolute nor democratic. If political scientists are to remain open to what is contingent in the present, there must be a vocabulary and grammar of analysis that can go beyond concern with particular political institutions, behaviour, or issues of policy in order to comprehend the character and variability of political authority.



## FOOTNOTES

\*This article has evolved from a series of studies of overloaded government financed by a grant from the Volkswagen Foundation to a work group of the European Consortium for Political Research headed by the author.

1. Fritz W. Scharpf, 'Public Organization and the Waning of the Welfare State: a Research Perspective', European Journal of Political Research 5 (1977), p.344.
2. See Samuel P. Huntington, 'Postindustrial Politics: How Benign Will it be?', Comparative Politics 6 (1974), p.166.
3. See Euro-Barometre (Brussels, Commission of the European Communities, No.8, 1978) pp.30-31.
4. For a full discussion of the concept of authority as it is employed here, see Richard Rose, 'Dynamic Tendencies in the Authority of Regimes', World Politics, 21 (1969), pp.612-28.
5. Scharpf, 'Public Organization and the Waning of the Welfare State', pp.343, 345.
6. For full details of the argument in this section, and citations to sources, see Richard Rose and Guy Peters, Can Government Go Bankrupt?, (New York: Basic Books, 1978); Cf. OECD Studies in Resource Allocation, Public Expenditure Trends (Paris, OECD, 1978) and Richard Rose, "Public spending trends--too good to be true?", The Times, (London) 8 August 1978.
7. This three-fold classification of causes is taken from Daniel Tarschys' wide-ranging review of the subject, 'The Growth of Public Expenditure: Nine Modes of Explanation', Scandinavian Political Studies Yearbook, 10 (1975).
8. Daniel Bell, 'The Public Household: On Fiscal Sociology and the Liberal Society', The Public Interest (1974).
9. The significance of loopholes in a seemingly successful Norwegian policy--provision for wages drift and financing wage increases by foreign borrowing against oil revenue--are outlined in Don S. Schwerin, 'The Limits of Organization as a Response to Wage-Price Problems', in Richard Rose (ed.), The Challenge to Governance (London, Sage Publications, forthcoming).
10. See Rose and Peters, Can Government Go Bankrupt?, Ch.7.
11. See Jack Hayward, 'Institutional Inertia and Political Impetus in France and Britain', European Journal of Political Research, 4 (1976) pp.341-59.
12. Kenneth Newton, Is Small Really So Beautiful? Is Big Really So Ugly? (Glasgow, University of Strathclyde, Studies in Public Policy No.18, 1978).

13. See President's Reorganization Project, Current Inventory of Organizational Units with the Executive Branch (Washington, D.C.: Executive Office of the President, 1977, duplicated) p.2.
14. Richard Rose, Managing Presidential Objectives (London, Macmillan Press, 1977), p.92.
15. For the growth of government comparatively, see Richard Rose, 'On the Priorities of Government: a Developmental Analysis of Public Policies', European Journal of Political Research <sup>4</sup> (1976), 247-89. Note also Herbert Kaufman, Are Government Organizations Immortal? (Washington, D.C., The Brookings Institution, 1976).
16. J.P. Worms, 'La Découverte du politique', quoted in Daniel Tarschys, 'The Soviet Political System: Three Models', European Journal of Political Research, 5 (1977), at p.310.
17. Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork and Red Tape: New Perspectives, New Directions (Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1978).
18. Cf. Richard Nathan, The Plot that Failed: Nixon and the Administrative Presidency (New York, John Wiley & Sons, 1975), and the three volumes of Diaries of R.H.S. Crossman, (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1975-77).
19. William Wallace, 'Walking Backwards toward Unity', in Helen Wallace, William Wallace and Carole Webb (eds.), Policy-Making in the European Communities (New York, John Wiley & Sons, 1977), p.302.
20. See Richard Rose, Governing without Consensus: an Irish Perspective (London, Faber and Faber, 1971), Ch.14.
21. Albert O. Hirschman, Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations and States (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1970), p.101.
22. See Richard Rose and Derek W. Urwin, Regional Differentiation Political Unity in Western Nations (London, Sage Professional Papers in Contemporary Political Sociology 06-007, 1975), Table 3.
23. Euro-Barometre No.8, p.20.
24. See e.g., W.H. Morris-Jones, 'In Defence of Apathy; Some Doubts on the Duty to Vote', Political Studies 2 (1954), and Robert A. Dahl, Who Governs? (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), Ch.19.
25. The title of a book by Guiseppe de Palma (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).
26. DOXA, Sondaggio di Opinione (Rome: Fondazione Agnelli Study, 1977).

27. Erwin K. Scheuch, "The Relationship of Government and Business to the Individual in Democratic and Totalitarian Systems" (Cologne: Institute for Applied Social Research, duplicated, 1977), p.2.

28. See Joachim Vogel, 'Taxation and Public Opinion in Sweden', National Tax Journal 28 (1974), and more generally, Burkhard Strumpel, "The Contribution of Survey Research to Public Finance", in A.T. Peacock, (ed.), Quantitative Analysis in Public Finance (New York) Praeger, (1969), p.26.

29. Alan Marsh, Protest and Political Consciousness (London: Sage Publications, 1977) pp.45, 62, found only two per cent endorsing the use of violence in political protest, whereas he classified 18 per cent as prepared to go "all the way" to repress protest. In a 1977 European Community survey, the anti-subversives outnumbered those favouring revolution by five to one; see Euro-Barometre, No.8, p.20.